

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

APPLICATION FOR PATENT

**TITLE: Product Promotion and Sales in Computer Games, Simulations, and the like**

PRIORITY CLAIM

[0001] The benefit under 35 U.S.C. Section 119(e) of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/433,255, filed on Dec. 13, 2002, and entitled "Product Promotion and Sales in Computer Games, Simulations, and the like" is hereby claimed. U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/433,255 is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] This invention relates to computer-implemented systems and methods for promotion including advertising, marketing, sales and so on, and in particular, to methods and systems promotion using computer games, simulations, demonstrations and the like.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] One of the first computer games was developed in the 1950's emulated a tennis or racket type game in a virtual environment. This early computer game was known as "pong". Development of other computer games followed this first computer game and included other action-oriented computer games as well as strategy-oriented computer games. Although development of computer games continues, the purposes of computer games have remained relatively unchanged since their inception.

[0005] Computer games have heretofore been designed and used for purposes of entertainment, instruction, and/or simulation. Many computer games are undoubtedly designed to be used for entertainment purposes. Other computer games are designed to be used for instructional purposes such as teaching or practicing skills. Still other computer games are designed to be used for simulation purposes such as planning strategy or assessing performance. Yet, still other computer games are designed to be used by a player for combined purposes. Examples of combined purposes are dual purpose games such as those which provide entertainment and instruction, or simulation

and instruction. Yet, computer games have not been used for other purposes. For example, computer games have not been designed for the purpose of assisting a consumer to buy or procure of goods, services, or real estate.

[0006] Sales of computer games as the primary source of revenue in the computer game industry. Sales of computer game systems are a secondary source of revenue. However, computer game systems are often sold at or below cost in order to promote sales of computer games. Hence, whether derived from sales of box games, arcade machines, or online subscriptions, sales of computer games is the profit center of the computer game industry.

[0007] Given this industry model, the computer game industry presently lacks other sources of revenue. Except for sales and promotion of computer games themselves, a computer game or computer game system heretofore did not incorporate advertising, marketing, selling, or promotion of other products such as goods, services or real property. For example, a computer game may include advertisements of other computer games. Advertisements of other games may be in various forms including printed material inserted in game packaging or information displayed on the video screen prior to game play. Traditional advertisements may also take the form of banners, scrolling text or tickers, flashing objects, pop-up windows, frames or borders, etc. during execution of the game. One problem caused by these advertisements is that these advertisements detract from the play of the computer game. Another problem is that these advertisements reduce the display area available for playing the game. Still another problem is that advertisers and marketers did not understand that computer games represented an untapped channel for advertising, marketing, selling and promotion similar to print ads, billboards, television, radio, cable, and the internet.

[0008] As a result, computer games have remained devoid of advertisements and promotions despite the growth in product placement following the release of the motion picture *The Extraterrestrial* (E.T.) and the growth of the number of computer game players. Advertisements, marketing, selling or promotion was primarily limited to products within the computer game industry. For example, there are sometimes advertisements about future computer game in the form of printed box inserts or trailers akin to those used in motion pictures. The only promotion has been in computer games situated in sports arenas where virtual billboards may be used akin to billboards in actual stadiums. Heretofore, computer games have not been used as a marketing channel for promotion and sales.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] This invention relates to computer games, simulations, or the like and other interactive programs and, more specifically, to systems and methods for providing programming relating to advertising, marketing, sales, promotion or the like of goods, services or real property.

[0010] The present invention recognizes that computer games and other interactive programs attract a growing number of players like broadcast and cable television attracts millions of viewers, radio attracts millions of listeners, and the web sites attract millions of visitors. Hence, visual displays used by computer games and other interactive programs have potential as a marketing channel like television and radio are marketing channels. Yet, computer games and other interactive programs have not heretofore been recognized as a marketing channel for advertising, marketing, sales or other promotion. The present invention includes systems and methods to use advertising, marketing, selling or promotion in a computer game or interactive program. Hence, the present invention enables advertisers and marketers to overcome past failures to recognize and develop this marketing channel.

[0011] Among the past failures include recent attempts at using computer games for advertising but not marketing or actual sales. These attempts taught only the use of advertisements in computer programs such as primitive banners or pop-up windows and generally required an online connection or other connected to a remote computer. While prior art teach use of primitive advertisements, they do not teach use of promotions. More significantly, the prior art does not teach used of games or simulations for actual sales.

[0012] An object of the present invention is for advertising, marketing, sales, listing, brokering or other forms of promotion of real property. One reason that the present invention is useful for promotion of real property is that the cost of a typical computer game or simulation, whether in a box or online, is very small relative to the cost of nearly any parcel of real property. Another reason that the present invention is useful for promotion of real property is the cost of a computer game or simulation is less than the cost of other forms of promotion used in relation to real property such as listings, showings, classified advertisements, print advertisements, videos, media spots, and so on. The present invention is especially useful where a plurality of units of comparable real estate are available for sale within a single development. Hence, the marginal cost of development of a computer game is low or negligible.

[0013] Another object of the invention includes systems and methods in computer games or interactive computer programs which are useful for advertising, marketing, sales, or other promotion of anything which can be sold, leased or transferred including goods, services, real property, information, and data.

[0014] Still another object of the invention is for advertising and promotion of manufacturers and vendors of any goods and services. Manufacturers and vendors of goods and services may be advertised or promoted via signs, uniforms, labels, trademarks, trade names, or simple color schemes. In a virtual environment, one or more manufacturers or vendors sponsors a game or simulation in the way that one or more manufacturer or vendors sponsors a professional sports game in the real environment. Hence, a player may don a uniform, gear, or other good which identifies one or more sponsors including the good's manufacturer or vendor, or both, or may identify one or more additional sponsors which is neither the manufacturer or vendor of the good.

[0015] Still another object of the invention is integration of promotion and/or sales within a computer game, simulation, or the like without detracting from the entertainment value of game, simulation, or the like. Yet, still another object of the invention is the integration of sales within a game, simulation, or demonstration in a manner which enhances its value whether it be entertainment, education, or other value.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] **FIG. 1A** is a schematic drawing of a circuit.

[0017] **FIGS. 1B** and **1C** are schematic drawings of alternative circuits.

[0018] **FIGS. 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E** and **2F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a brand or a branded product or service.

[0019] **FIGS. 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E** and **3F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a product at any time before, during, or after play or during practice or training.

[0020] **FIGS. 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E** and **4F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a product at a shop.

[0021] **FIGS. 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E** and **5F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and execution of a contract relating to goods, services, or real property.

[0022] **FIGS. 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E** and **6F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a real property.

[0023] **FIGS. 7, 8, and 9** are flowcharts of systems and methods of promotion and sales.

[0024] **FIGS. 10A** and **10B** are flowcharts of alternative methods of initialization.

[0025] **FIG. 11** is a flowchart of alternative methods of promotion.

[0026] **FIG. 12A** is a flowchart of alternative visual effects of used in promotion. **FIGS. 12B** and **12C** are continuations of the flowchart in **FIG. 12A**.

[0027] **FIG. 13A** is flowchart of alternative methods of making a selection. **FIG. 13B** is a continuation of the flowchart in **FIG. 13A**.

[0028] **FIGS. 14A, 14B** and **14C** are a series of drawings of a graphical object in the form of a sign.

[0029] **FIGS. 15A, 15B, 15C and 15D** are a series of drawings of promoted product and a label or tag.

[0030] **FIGS. 16A, 16B, 16C and 16D** are a series of drawings of a position indicator in simulated motion.

[0031] **FIG. 17** is a series of drawings of alternative position indicators.

[0032] **FIGS. 18A, 18B and 18C** are drawings of alternative graphical buttons for making a selection.

[0033] **FIGS. 19A, 19B and 19C** are drawings of alternative graphical buttons for making a purchase decision.

[0034] **FIG. 20** is a series of drawings of alternative graphical buttons.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0035] With reference to all the drawing figures: a promoted product is depicted by a series of numerals **300, 310, 320, 330** (symbolically "**3n0**"); a computer game, a simulation, or the like (collectively "a computer game") is depicted by numeral **1300**; a promotion engine is depicted by numeral **1400**; and an e-commerce system is depicted by numeral **1600**. A promoted product may include a good, service, contract, real property, and so on. A computer game may include a computer game, simulation, demonstration, or similar interactive program. A promotion engine may include use of graphical objects, labels, symbols, colors, additional effects, and so on. An e-commerce system may include a shopping cart, merchant account, and so on.

[0036] **FIG. 1A** is a schematic drawing of a circuit having a central processor **10** in communication with at least one storage medium **20**, at least one display **30**, and at least one input device **40**. In one embodiment of the invention, the circuit comprises the central processor **10**, the storage medium **20**, the display **30**, and the input device **40**. In another embodiment, the circuit also comprises a video processor **50** in communication with the central processor and the display. In a further embodiment, the circuit also comprises a second storage medium **22** in communication with the central processor. In still another embodiment, the circuit also comprises an output device **70** in communication with the central processor. In yet still another embodiment, the circuit comprises a sound processor **52** in communication with the central processor and at least one speaker **32**. **FIGS. 1B and 1C** are schematic drawings of alternative circuits showing still other embodiments. In one of these embodiments, the audio processor and video processor are a single audio-visual processor **54**. In another, the central processor is in communication with a network **72**. In still another, the circuit also comprises an input-output processor **74** in communication with the central processor and the network **72**. In yet still another, the circuit also comprises a plurality of storage mediums **22**, input devices **40**, displays **30**, and/or speakers **32**. In yet still another, the circuit also comprises

a plurality of output devices **70**, auxiliary processors **80**, and/or networks **72**. The circuit may be housed or situated within a game box, cartridge, console, or personal computer. In **FIGS 1A, 1B and 1C**, bus or electric power lines are shown by dashed lines and alternative components and devices are shown by phantom, or dot-dash, lines.

[0037] In operation, the central processor receives input communicated from the input device **40**, processes said input in accordance with instructions and/or data communicated from the storage medium **20**, and transmits output to the display **30**. Where the input device is not a keyboard or mouse, the input device may be a game controller of the type manufactured by Thrustmaster of Montreal, QC. Where a speaker **32** is present, the central processor or audio processor also transmits output to the speaker. The storage medium **20** records information communicated from the central processor. In one embodiment the storage medium may be a hard drive of the type manufactured by Quantum Corp. of Milpitas, CA. Alternatively, the central processor receives instructions and/or data from the storage medium **20** and/or a second storage medium **22**. The second storage medium **22** may be a DVD, CDROM, memory stick, programmable read only memory (PROM), electronically-alterable programmable memory (EPROM), or the like. In another embodiment, the second storage medium **22** is an integrated circuit housed within a game box. In still another embodiment, the second storage medium is a CDROM which is removeably connected to the circuit.

[0038] The circuit and is powered by a source **62** of direct current (DC) power or alternating current (AC) power. Where the source is AC power, a transformer **60** is in communication with the source **62**. The transformer may be a board-mounted transformer of the magnetic type manufactured by Hammond Manufacturing of Cheektowaga, NY or a stand-alone power adapter of the type manufactured by Motorola Corporation of Schaumburg, IL. Where the mode is online, the central processor is in communication with the network **72** and the input-output device **74** may be a network card of the type manufactured by Novell Communications of Provo UT; a dial-up modem of the type manufactured by Hayes Corporation of Boston MA; or an alternative type of modem such as wireless, DSL, or cable modems which remain "always-on". In still another embodiment, the central processor is in communication with a third storage medium **23** at a remote location whereby information about the game operational parameters, promotions, selections, and/or purchase decisions are transmitted to and from the remote location. In still yet another embodiment, the central processor is in communication with a fourth, fifth, sixth, etc. storage mediums **24, 25, 26, etc.** at multiple locations.

[0039] With reference to **FIGS. 2** through **FIG 6**, a graphical object representing a promoted product is depicted by a series of numerals **300a, 310a, 320a...**(collectively "**3n0a**"); a graphical object or visual effect representing a promotion **14nn** is depicted by a series of numerals **400, 410, 420...**(collectively "**4n0**"); alternative methods for making a selection using a position indicator are depicted by a series of numerals **500a, 500b, 500c, 500d, 500e...**(collectively "**500**"); alternative methods of making a purchase decision are depicted by numerals **700a, 700b, 700c, 700d, 700e...**(collectively "**700**"). The screen **600** of the display **30** shows a graphical objects depicted by numerals **100** and

**200** for use in making a selection **500a** and making a purchase decision **700a**, respectively. In one embodiment, the screen shows a graphical object **810** for use in making a selection **500b** and/or a graphical object **820** for use in making a purchase decision **700b**. The screen may also show a graphical object **910** for use in making a selection **500e** and/or a graphical object **920** making a purchase decision **700e**. In another embodiment, the screen shows a graphical object **310a** representing the promoted product for use in making a selection **500d** or a graphical object **320a** representing the promoted product making a purchase decision **700d**. In still another alternative, the screen shows a graphical object **400** representing the promotion for use in making a selection **500c** or a graphical object **410** representing the promotion making a purchase decision **700d**.

[0040] **FIGS. 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2E and 2F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a brand or a branded product or service at any time before, during or after operation of the computer game. **FIGS. 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E and 3F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a product such as a golf club(s) at any time before, during, or after play or during a practice or training session. **FIGS. 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E and 4F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a product such as a shirt off the rack at a shop. **FIGS. 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E and 5F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and execution of a contract for the sale of goods, services, or real property. **FIGS. 6A, 6B, 6C, 6D, 6E and 6F** are a series of perspective drawings showing promotion, selection, and sale of a real property. In **FIGS. 2A through 6F**, alternative objects are shown by dashed lines.

[0041] In **FIGS. 2A-2F and 3A-3F**, the graphical objects **100** and **200** are images of rectangular buttons, the graphical objects **8n0** are images of a shopping cart, and the visual effect **400** representing a promotion **14nn** is an starburst effect **1750t** whereby graphical object **310a** is essence graphical object **300a** surrounded by a starburst, explosion or the like. In **FIGS. 4A-4F**, the graphical objects **100** and **200** are images of rectangular buttons, the graphical objects **8n0** are images of a shopping cart, the graphical objects **9n0** are images of a label or tag, and the visual effect **400** representing a promotion **14nn** is an aura effect **1750r** whereby graphical object **310a** is graphical object **300a** surrounded or silhouetted by an aura, glow, or the like. In **FIGS. 5A-5F**, the visual effect **400** representing a promotion **14nn** is a callout effect **1750s** whereby graphical object **310a** is same as graphical object **300a** except for the callout effect. In **FIGS. 6A-6F**, the graphical objects **100** and **200** are images of rectangular buttons and the visual effect **400** representing the promotion **14nn** includes a zoom-in effect **1750g** whereby graphical object **310a** is an enlargement of graphical object **300a**. In addition, **FIGS. 6A-6F** show a second visual effect **400** representing the promotion **14nn** is a flag or banner **1750ii** in the vicinity of graphical object **310a**. In another embodiment, the visual effect **400** representing the promotion **14nn** includes combination of colorization effect **1750h** and de-colorization effect **1750k** whereby graphical object **310b** is pronounced but remains unchanged in size from graphical object **300a**. In still other embodiments, graphical object **310a** may be changed or unchanged from **300a** and graphical objects **4n0** are one or more effects **1750a...1750zz** including callouts, outlines,

auras, starbursts, colorization, and so on. In yet still other embodiments, the graphical objects **100**, **200**, **4n0**, **8n0**, and **9n0** may be buttons or other graphical objects having various shapes or styles or be text, symbols, iconographics, drawings, pictures, images, effects and so on.

[0042] The screen **600** of the display **30** also shows a promoted product **3n0** and a promotion **4n0** for use in either making a selection or making a purchase decision. Making a selection and making a purchase decision may be made using the position indicator alone or in combination with physical buttons or keys on the input device **40** depending on a predetermined event or events communicated from the input device. Alternately, selection and making a purchase decision may be made by physical buttons or keys alone on the input device **40**.

[0043] In **FIGS. 7, 8 and 9** flowcharts show the system and methods of promotion and sales. In **FIGS 7,8 and 9**, alternative steps are shown by dashed lines. In **FIG. 7** the flowchart shows the steps of initiating the graphics engine **1010**; initiating the sound engine **1020**; initiating the promotion engine **1030**; checking if online **1040**; trying to connect **1050**; checking if connected **1060**; initiating the online mode **1080a** or initiating the offline mode **1080b**; starting game, simulation or the like **1310**; checking if power if off **1860**; checking if disconnected **1870**; checking if game is over **1880**; and/or ending program **1990**. In **FIG. 7**, the flowchart also shows a step of communication over a network **1060** as well as alternative steps of conducting a pre-game in online mode **1250a**; and conducting a pre-game in a offline mode **1250b**; conducting a post-game **1900**; checking if to pause game **1875**; pausing game **1880**.

[0044] In **FIGS. 8 and 9** a flowchart shows the steps of a game **1300**, a promotion engine **1400**, and an e-commerce system **1600**. The e-commerce system includes a shopping cart **85** for holding selections and a merchant account or the like **90** for making purchases and performing financial transactions. The flowchart also shows alternative steps pre-game **1250a** (or **1250b**) and a post-game **1900**. In the game, the flowchart shows steps of starting game **1310**, operating game, simulation or the like **1320**, and end game **1890**. In the promotion engine, the flowchart shows steps of a series of promotions **1401, 1402, 1403...14nn** (collectively **14nn**) and a series of making selections **1501, 1502, 1503...15nn** (collectively **15nn**). In the pre-game, the flowchart shows alternative steps of making a series of preliminary promotion(s) **1261, 1262, 1263...126n** (collectively **126n**); making a series of selection(s) **1271, 1272, 1273...127n** (collectively **127n**); a series of auto selection(s) **1281, 1282, 1283...128n** (collectively **128n**); and adjusting operational parameters **1285**. In the post-game, the flowchart shows the step of reviewing held selection(s) **1940**. In the post-game, the flowchart also shows alternative steps of making a series of final promotion(s) **1911, 1912, 1913...191n** (collectively **191n**) and making a series of selections **1921, 1922, 1923...192n** (collectively **192n**). The flowchart also shows communication with an e-commerce system **1600** in which occur the alternative steps of making a purchase decision during the pre-game **1290**, making a series of purchase decisions during the game **1601, 1602, 1603...16nn** (collectively **16nn**), making a series of purchase decisions after the game **1931, 1932,**



**1933...193n** (collectively "**193n**"), or making a purchase decision after review the held selections **1950**.

[0045] In operation, a game player is able to make a single selection **1501** or a series of selections **15nn** following the corresponding promotion(s) **14nn** and a player is able to make a single purchase **1601** or a series of purchases **16nn** following the corresponding selection(s) **15nn**. A single promotion **1261** or series of promotions **1261, 1262, 1263...126n** may occur before the before the game **1300**. A game player is able to make a single selection **1271** or a series of selections **127n** following the promotion(s) **126n** and a player is able to make a single purchase decision **1281** or a series of purchase decisions **128n** following the selection(s) **127n**. If the game player does not make a selection or series of selections, a single auto selection **1280** or a group of auto selections **128n** is able to be made automatically. Similarly, a single promotion **1911** or series of promotions **1911, 1912, 1913...191n** may occur after the game **1300**. A game player is able to make a single selection **1921** or a series of selections **192n** following the promotion(s) **191n** and a player is able to make a single purchase decision **1931** or a series of purchase decisions **193n** following the selection(s) **192n**. In **FIG. 9**, the flowchart shows a series of steps of adding to shopping cart **16nn-a** and the step of making a purchase decision after reviewing held selections **1950a**. The flowchart shows the alternative steps of making purchase decision(s) **1290a**; holding selection(s) **1290b** before the game; adding to wish list **16nn-b**; making a purchase decision **16nn-c**; and holding a selection **16nn-d** during the game; making purchase decisions **1930a** and holding selection(s) **1930b** after the game; and making purchase decisions **1950a** and saving selection(s) **1950b** after reviewing held selections **1940**. The alternative steps hold selections **1290b**, hold selections **16nn-d**, and hold selections **1930b** include selections adding to shopping cart similar to step **16nn-a**. The alternative step save selections **1950b** includes saving the shopping cart to at least one storage medium **20** or **22**.

[0046] **FIGS. 10A** and **10B** show flowcharts of initializing online mode **1080a** and offline mode **1080b**, respectively. In **FIG. 10A**, a flowchart shows the steps of checking user identity **1100**, re-login user **1110**, checking if user data requires updating **1120**, receiving current code(s) from remote computer **1190c**, locally-saving code(s) **1205**, and setting operational parameter(s) of game according to code(s) **1245**. The flowchart shows the alternative steps of collecting new user data **1130a**; transmit new user data to remote computer **1140a**; registering new user at remote computer **1160a**; generating initial code(s) at remote computer **1170a**; receiving initial code(s) from remote computer **1190a**; and login new user **1200a** or the alternative steps of collecting updated user data **1130b**; transmit updated user data to remote computer **1140b**; generating updated code(s) at remote computer **1170b**; and receiving updated code(s) from remote computer **1190b**. The flowchart also shows communication with a network **72** at intermediate steps **1150a/b** and **1180a/b/c**. In operation, locally-saving may include communication with at least one storage medium **20** or **22** and may include communication through the network **72**. Initial or updated code(s) may be used to set the operational parameters of the game or simulation including the complexity and details of the game or simulation, the presence or not of teammates or competitors, and each player's attributes such as

speed, skill, stealth, power, invincibility, and so on. Determination of initial and updated code(s) may depend on various factors. The initial codes may be based on information such as user demographics, interests, preferences, planned purchases taken from user data and/or targeted promotion or marketing codes corresponding to short duration or long-lasting promotions. The updated codes may be based on the same information to the initial codes plus additional information such as player performance, player frequency, actual purchases, and brand loyalty.

[0047] In **FIG 10B**, a flowchart shows the steps of checking user identity **1090**, login in user locally **1200b**, checking if user data requires updating **1210**, checking if enhanced play is allowed **1215**, retrieve locally-saved code(s) **1230c**, and setting operational parameter(s) of game according to code(s) **1150**. The flowchart shows the alternative steps of checking if user wishes enhanced play **1095**; registering new user at locally **1220a**; retrieving pre-defined code(s) **1230a**; saving new user data at locally **1240a** or the alternative steps of checking if enhanced play is allowed **1215**; creating temp user data **1220b**; generating temp code(s) **1230b**; and saving temp user data **1240b**. Although the flowchart does not show communication with the network **72**, locally-saved and locally-registering includes communication with at least one storage medium **20** or **22** and may include communication through the network **72**. Predetermined or temp code(s) may be used to set the operational parameters of the game or simulation including the complexity and details of the game or simulation, the presence or not of teammates or competitors, and each player's attributes such as speed, skill, stealth, power, invincibility, and so on. The predetermined and temp code(s) may depend on various factors. The predetermined code(s) may be based on information such as assumptions of user demographics. The temp code(s) may be based on user demographics, interests, preferences, and/or targeted promotion or marketing codes corresponding to long-lasting promotions.

[0048] With reference to **FIGS. 11, 12A, 12B, and 12C**, an object refers to a graphical object. **FIG. 11** shows a flowchart of methods of conducting a promotion **14nn**. The flowchart shows the steps of selecting object for promotion **1700**; checking if object is displayed **1710**; and displaying object **1712**. The flowchart also shows the alternative steps of checking if sound(s) need be added **1714**; adding sound(s) **1716**; checking if label(s) need be added **1718**; adding a label(s) **1720**; checking if symbol(s) need be added **1722**; adding symbol(s) **1724**; checking if color(s) need be added **1726**; adding color(s) **1728**; checking if one or more [visual] effect(s) need be added **1740**; and adding one or more effect(s) **1750a, 1750b, 1750c....** to an object. Although generally visual effects, effects may also include audio-visual or even non-visual effects such as tactile or olfactory. **FIG. 12A** is a flowchart of alternative visual effects as part of conducting a promotion. **FIGS. 12B and 12C** are continuations of the flowchart in **FIG. 12A**. The flowchart shows the addition of one or more visual effect(s) **1750a...1750hh** to a promoted product **300a** as part of a promotion **14nn**. Visual effects include underlining an object **1750a**, shadowing an object **1750b**, embossing an object **1750c**, and so on. Additional visual effects will be apparent to one skilled in the art. For example, another visual effect is a waving flag, banner, or the like **1750ii**. It will be appreciated that certain visual effects or combinations of effects are more likely to be effective than others for purposes of promotion. For example, visual effects which enlarge an object **1750f**,

zoom-in an object **1750g**, add glow to object **1750q**, add aura to object **1750r**, add starburst to object **1750t**, add explosion around object **1750u**, add callout to object **1750s**, and colorize an object **1750h**, and multiple effects **1750hh** such as combination of **1750h** and **1750k** are more likely to be effective.

[0049] **FIG. 13A** is flowchart of alternative methods of making a selection **1800**, **1801**, **1802...18nn** (collectively "**18nn**"). **FIG. 13B** is a continuation of the flowchart in **FIG. 13A**. With reference to **FIGS. 13A, 13B, and 13C**, object A may refer to many graphical objects **100**, **810**, **310a**, **400**, and so on while object B refers to the graphical object representing a promoted product **310a**. Methods of making a selection **18nn** include pointing at object A **1800**; point at object A and click physical button **1801**; hover pointer over object A **1802**; drag pointer across object A **1803**; and so on. Other methods of making a selection will be apparent to a person skilled in the art. For example, making a selection may be accomplished by pressing a physical button or buttons on an input device **40** such as typing a predetermined key or combination of key on a keyboard. It will be appreciated that certain methods of making selections are more convenient than other methods. For example, physical button on the input device may not be available for use given the requirements of a given game, simulation, or the like. It will also be appreciated that methods of making a selection may also apply to methods of making purchase decisions **129n**, **16nn**, **193n**, **195n**. It will be appreciated that it may be convenient or even necessary to restrict the making of purchase decisions to before and/or after the game or simulation rather than during the game or simulation. It may also be convenient to restrict the making of selections to before and/or after the game or simulation. Regardless of these restrictions, conducting promotions **14nn** could continue throughout the game. In addition, in the pre-game, auto selections **128n** could selected one or more promoted products if a player did not make selections **127n**. In the post-game, final promotions **191n** could repeat earlier promotions **14nn** allowing the player to make selections **192n**. In this way, distractions could be avoided and the value of the game or simulation would not be diminished. This is particularly true in cases of fast-paced or real-time games, simulations or the like.

[0050] **FIGS. 14A, 14B and 14C** are a series of drawings of a graphical object in the form of a sign. In **FIG. 14A** a graphical object **900** is an a-frame sign with a first horizontal box **905**. In **FIG. 14B**, a graphical object **910** is the a-frame sign with the first horizontal box **905**, a second horizontal box **915a**, and a diagonal box **915b** following a promotion **126n**, **14nn**, or **191n**. In **FIG. 14C**, a graphical object **920** is the a-frame sign with a first horizontal box **905**, a second horizontal box **925a**, and a diagonal box **925b** following a making a selection **127n**, **15nn**, or **192n**. In operation, the boxes **905**, **9n5a**, and **9n5b** may contain text, numerals, images, or so on. For example, horizontal box **905** may have the text "for sale" and horizontal box **925a** and diagonal box **925b** may have the text "sold." Alternatively, the horizontal box **905** may be have the image or colors of a brand. It will be appreciated that a graphical object in the form of a sign may be effective for promotion of various products.

[0051] **FIGS. 15A, 15B, 15C and 15D** are a series of drawings of a graphical objects representing promoted products **3n0** having a label or tag. In **FIG. 15A** the graphical

object **3n0** is cap with a label **3n5d** across the brow and a tag **9[n-1]0**. In **FIG. 15B** the graphical object **3n0** is shirt with a label **3n5a** across the breast, a label **3n5c** across the waist, labels **3n5b** along the shoulders and arms, and a tag **9[n-1]0**. In **FIG. 15C** the graphical object **3n0** is pants with a label **3n5f** across the waist, labels **3n5e** down legs, and a tag **9[n-1]0**. In **FIG. 15D** the graphical object **3n0** is shoes with a label **3n5g** across the side and a tag **9[n-1]0**. In operation, the labels **3n5a**, **3n5b**, **3n5c**,...**3n5g** and the tag **9[n-1]0** may contain text, numerals, images, or so on. It will be appreciated that the brand of a promoted product may be identified by brand name, symbol or logo located on a label or tag of a promoted product. It will also be appreciated that certain brands may be more easily identified by the use of a distinctive combination of colors, shapes or patterns. Hence, a graphical object representing a promoted product **310a** may not require labels if distinctive colors, shapes or patterns are employed.

[0052] **FIGS. 16A, 16B, 16C and 16D** are a series of drawings of a position indicator **2nnn** in simulated motion. In **FIGS. 16A through 16D**, a position indicator is a pointed arrow **2001** similar to position indicators in windows-based operating systems of the type manufactured by Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, WA. In **FIG. 16A** the position indicator does not show a trail. In **FIGS. 16B, 16C, and 16D**, the trail of the position indicator is incrementally longer. **FIG. 17** is a series of drawings of alternative position indicators **2nnn**. For example, a position indicator may be one of many a targets **2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012** and so on. It will be appreciated that a graphical object used as a position indicator **2nnn** may take the form of nearly anything including a symbol, icon, or image of a promoted product.

[0053] **FIGS. 18A, 18B and 18C** are drawings of alternative graphical objects **100, 8n0, and 900** for making a selection **127n, 15nn, and 192n**. Horizontal boxes **105, 8n5, and 905** are shown corresponding to graphical objects for making a selection. Similarly, **FIGS. 19A, 19B and 19C** are drawings of alternative buttons for making a purchase decision **128n, 16nn, 193n, and 195n**. Horizontal boxes **205, 8n5, and 905** are shown corresponding to graphical objects for making a purchase decision. It will be apparent to a person skilled in the art that these boxes may be vertical, diagonal or shape and that graphical objects **100, 200, 8n0, and 9n0** may have various alternative shapes **3nnn**. With reference to **FIGS. 2A through 2F**, these graphical objects may be used when making a selection by method **500a, 500b, or 500e** and when making a purchase decision by method **700a, 700b, or 700e**. Other graphical objects **310a and 4n0** may be used when making a selection by **500c or 500d** or making a purchase decision by method **700c or 700d**.

[0054] **FIG. 20** is a series of drawings of graphical objects having alternative shapes **3nnn**. Alternative shapes for graphical objects include polygons, icons, and so on. It will be appreciated that some shapes or icons are more easily recognized as buttons than other shapes or icons. For example, graphical object **3001** appears to be a button to depress. It will also be appreciated that nearly any graphical object may be used. For example, graphical object **3011** is a drawing of a shopping cart, graphical object **3013** is a paper scroll, and graphical object **3014** is a drawing of a house. Hence, a graphical object representing the promoted object **310a** may be suitable. With reference to **FIGS 5A**

through **5F**, graphical object **3013** representing a contract or agreement for goods, service, or real property. With reference to **FIGS 6A** through **6F**, graphical object **3014** representing a house or real property.

[0055] The invention may be practiced on any computer or electronic device capable any manner or form of visual display. All types of computers, computer systems, and computer networks having the capability of a visual display can generally be programmed to operate computer games and interactive programs. Even those without capability of visual display can be programmed to operate a variety of computer games or interactive programs. In addition, many electronic devices can be programmed to operate a computer game or interactive program.

[0056] Computers and electronic devices may include any type of computer and computer system such as personal computers, laptop computers, notebook computers, handheld computers, arcade game machines, handheld games, video game systems, video game consoles, video game boxes, personal digital assistants, mobile computing devices, cable boxes, telephones, telecomputing devices, and telecommunication devices. Computer networks may include all types of networks such as local area networks (LANs), wide area networks (WANs), private virtual networks, peer-to-peer, world wide web (WWW), intranets, extranets, and the internet. One embodiment includes a game console of the type manufactured by Sony Electronics Corp. or Microsoft Corp. Another embodiment includes cable box of the type made by webTV. Still another embodiment includes a personal computer of the type manufactured by Dell Computers. Still yet another embodiment includes handheld computer or personal digital assistant. The computer processor may be a single integrated circuit or comprise multiple integrated circuits having different functions i.e. central processing unit (CPU), input-output (I/O) processing, video processing, sound processing, and so on. The display may be any type of display or projection system such as oscilloscope, vector tube, cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), and any flat panel display, TFT, etc.

[0057] In one embodiment of the invention, goods may include equipment, gear, equipment, uniforms, clothing or the like. In another embodiment, services may include training, coaching, practice, tutoring educational programs or the like. In a further embodiment, real property may include developed or undeveloped parcels in one or more locales (e.g. cities, country clubs, resorts, housing subdivisions, planned unit developments, university campuses, corporate parks, etc.) where the virtual location may emulate the actual locale. A default location may be pre-determined by the computer program or the location may be selected from a group or list of locations. Other defaults may be predetermined depending on product(s) to be promoted. For example, only a single product may be promoted, or multiple products within a single brand, or multiple brands.

[0058] It will be appreciated that pre-game may include activities for either spectators or participants, or both. For spectators, one embodiment of the invention may be a pre-game show. A pre-game show may include a myriad of content such as commentary,

scores, clips, statistics, and so on. For participants, another embodiment may include a training session as part of the pre-game. A training session may include instruction by one or more instructors having relevant expertise. A default instructor may be pre-determined by the computer game or the instructor may be selected by a player from a group or panel of instructors. The group or panel may include various celebrities or commercial instructors. For example, the player of a golf computer game could select a particular golf instructor from a panel of golf instructors. The selected instructor may extend offers to the player regarding other products and services. For example, the golf instructor may endorse or in some manner promote name brand equipment and/or programs of additional golf lessons. The player may or may not pay a fee to select the instructor. Accordingly, the computer game may be used to promote instructors and other products including goods or services associated with training.

[0059] Another embodiment of the invention may include a warmup or practice session. The practice session may be a virtual environment emulating the practice area including equipment, gear, and/or clothing. Play may include no players, one player, or multiple players. In addition, play may be player-controlled or simulated. In an embodiment of the invention, the practice sessions include promotional displays of merchandise, products, or services. Promotional displays of merchandise may include generic or brand name products. Ps, TMx, trademarks, tradenames use of brand name equipment.

[0060] Still another embodiment of the invention may include a visit to an area for preparation including a clubhouse, pro shop, locker room, gear shop, pit, dugout, batting cage, deck, bench, sideline, backstage, wing, or dressing room. A further embodiment is visiting a virtual shopping mall. In this way, any product may be advertised, marketed, or sold.

[0061] Still yet another embodiment of the invention is the providing of incentives to purchase promoted products. For example, purchase of a product could boost speed, skill, or power of a player during game play. In this way, an incentive is bestowed on a prospective purchaser to encourage the purchase of a promoted product. A further embodiment of the invention includes an incentive of the bestowing stealth, wisdom, invincibility, or another attribute on a player during the game. In one embodiment, the enhanced speed, power, or other attribute is related to the product or service purchased. For example, purchase of a golf club or golf ball would bestow on the player who purchases the club or ball a longer drive down the fairway. In this way, the promotion is better targeted to a person who has significant incentive to purchase promoted products.

[0062] From the foregoing it will be appreciated that although specific embodiments of the technology have been described herein for purposes of illustration, various modifications may be made without deviating from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, the user may lease products or services rather than purchase them outright. Also, the user may provide personal information as consideration in addition to or in lieu of payment for products and services. The promotional system may output a selected promotion in ways other than visually displaying promotions on a screen. For example, a promotion may be output in an audio form. Further, the invention can be used with

personal computers, computer terminals, television sets, video game machines, video game boxes, web TV, cable TV, video consoles, laptop computers, notebook computers, handheld computers, personal digital assistants, telephones, cell phones, pagers, and so on. Accordingly, the invention should be broadly construed and is not limited except with respect to the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer-implemented method for promotion of products within an electronic game, comprising:  
  
receiving at least one input from a player, whereby the player is identified;  
  
displaying at least one graphical object representing a promoted product, whereby the promoted product is brought to the attention of the player; and  
  
in response to at least one action being performed by the player, processing at least one request from the player, whereby the promoted product is selected.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein, in response to a first action being performed by the player, the player receives at least one item of information about the promoted product without requiring a second action being performed by the player.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the graphical object includes at least one item of information which identifies the promoted product.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein, in response to at least one action being performed by the player, the promoted product is added to an electronic shopping cart.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein, in response to at least one action performed by the player, a purchase of the promoted product is completed.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein the promoted product is a good.
7. The method of claim 1 wherein the promoted product is a service.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein the promoted product is a contract.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein the promoted product is an interest in a real property.
10. A computer system which embodies the method of claim 1.
11. A computer program which, when executed by a computer, performs the method of claim 1.